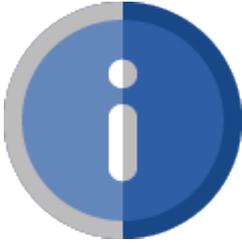




National  
Operational  
Guidance

**Categorisation of areas of nature conservation ..... 2**



# Categorisation of areas of nature conservation

---

There is a risk of damage to some ANC from fire and rescue service (FRS) activities. Examples include:

- Firefighting, leading to the run-off of contaminated firewater
- Over abstraction of water from pumping
- Vehicle movement that could damage sensitive species

A method of categorising ANC locations has therefore been devised which works by dividing ANCs into four categories based on their susceptibility to environmental damage from FRS actions.

The categories are numbered 1 to 4 with category 4 presenting the highest risk of environmental contamination from an incident.

## **Category 1 - Very low risk**

These sites have been designated as geological sites. They present a very low risk or are not deemed to be susceptible to environmental damage from FRS operations. The contamination and damage will be minimal and will not affect the Condition Assessment of the interest. Nature conservation interests will not require restoration and will recover in the short term.

## **Category 2 - Low risk**

These sites tend to be woodland or meadows. Controlled fires in these areas can sometimes have a beneficial effect but they may include protected animal and plant species. These sites present a low risk of environmental damage as a result of FRS operations. The contamination and damage will be temporary but could affect the Condition Assessment of the interest. Geological and nature conservation interests will require minimal restoration but will recover in the short term.

## **Category 3 - Significant environmental damage risk**

These sites include various wetlands, rivers, ponds and lakes, and shorelines. Nationally protected species of animal, insects, bio-diverse habitats, flower and fauna are contained within these areas. This type of site will require a strategic approach to limit any possible environmental damage. At such sites the abstraction of water for firefighting may affect water levels and impact biodiversity. Any contamination or damage will affect the Condition Assessment of the interest. Geological and nature conservation interests will require moderate restoration or will recover in the medium term.

## **Category 4 - High environmental damage risk**

These sites are extremely susceptible to environmental damage as a result of FRS operations. Similar to Category 3 locations, these areas include various wetlands, rivers, ponds and lakes, and shorelines. They also contain nationally protected species of animal, insects, bio-diverse habitats, flower and fauna which are extremely susceptible to environmental damage. Any damage is likely to be permanent and will significantly affect the Condition Assessment of the interest. Geological and nature conservation interests will require total restoration and will only recover in the long term. Where incidents occur on or near these sites, Incident commanders should identify any environmental risk, put in place environmental protection measures, inform the relevant agencies and, where necessary, request them to attend.

A SSSI identified by Natural England as a Category 4 site is the South Thames Estuary and Marshes in Kent. The site is on the south side of the Thames Estuary and the marshes extend for about 15 km along the south side of the estuary and include intertidal areas on the north side of the estuary.

The site consists of an extensive area of grazing marsh, salt marsh, mudflats and shingle, characteristic of the estuarine habitats of the north Kent marshes. There is a former oil storage depot within the area and a railway line borders part of the south west boundary, running from the Isle of Grain, which is used to convey fuel to and from locations on the island.



The South Thames Estuary and Marshes Photo courtesy of Kent Fire and Rescue Service

### **Risk information plans and generic action plans**

The FRS should consider having separate emergency response plans with Environmental Risk Notes for sites of nature conservation that are more susceptible to environmental damage. An example of an Environmental Risk Note for a SSSI is in [Appendix 10](#).

These plans are aide memoires to help personnel identify the preventative actions to take when attending incidents on or close to sites of nature conservation. They relate to general site information based on an identified ANC category. Where there is any doubt as to the environmental impact on a SSSI, Natural England should be contacted for more information. FRSs in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales may wish to consider a similar approach with their relevant nature conservation body.

Natural England, and other environmental organisations, manages a number of SSSIs directly, as National Nature Reserves. The majority of these sites have individual emergency plans which are prepared, and shared, with the local FRS.